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News Release

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Mill Creek park manager announces alternate access route, facility improvements, winter schedule changes, special events

Walla Walla, Wash. – Outdoor recreation enthusiasts will find improved facilities, winter access, and opportunities for hunters at the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Mill Creek Project recreation area here.

Within the past year, the Corps' Walla Walla District made several improvements to facilities at the project's Rooks Park. The parking lot was expanded and paved trails were made more accessible for visitors with strollers or in wheelchairs.

"We've just finished a new picnic shelter, too," said the Corps' Mill Creek Project Park Manager Dave Hays. "When visitors reserve the shelter for the day, we post a sign informing others that the space is taken. If there is no reservation for a particular day, anyone can use the shelter on a first-come, first-serve basis."

To reserve the picnic shelter, call the Mill Creek Project office at (509) 527-7160.

Recreation officials want to remind all facility users that hunting season has started, and that visitor safety is the Corps' paramount concern.

The Mill Creek Project is one of the largest public open space areas in the Walla Walla Valley. A wide variety of recreational opportunities are available, including hunting for white-tailed deer, quail, pheasant, and waterfowl. Specific areas are open for hunting in accordance with all applicable state regulations. Shotguns and archery equipment only are allowed at Mill Creek.

Hunters must unload their guns before walking through no-hunting areas. All designated hunting areas are also open for other recreation such as walking, horseback riding, and bicycling so hunters should work fields in a direction that moves away from other recreational users. Visitors might consider wearing brightly colored clothing while in hunting areas, said Hays.

Birddogs and their handlers will show their skills Sept. 28-29 during the 31st Annual American Kennel Club Licensed Field Trials for Springer Spaniels, held at Rooks Park. The event, organized

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NEW ROUTE/2-2-2

by the Inland Empire English Springer Spaniel Club in Spokane, Wash., draws participants from all over the Pacific Northwest and parts of Canada, said a club official. "In past years, we've had several AKC national field champions come here for this trial," said Dave Johnson, club secretary.

The public is invited to come watch the events but Johnson cautions observers to wear a safety-orange jacket and/or hat as live ammunition will be used during the trials. Trials begin at 8 a.m. both days. For information, call Johnson at (208) 875-0329.

Rooks Park will close to motor vehicle traffic and shut down its public restrooms and drinking fountains Oct. 15 in preparation for winter weather conditions. The park will remain open daily from 7 a.m. to sunset. Visitors are encouraged to continue using the park, entering on foot or bicycle, until it resumes a summer schedule. Portable-type facilities will be available while the other restrooms are closed.

The 5th Annual Downtown Walla Walla Foundation Fall Festival of Foliage and Feathers is set for Oct. 26-29, with several of its daily tours and activities held at Rooks Park. A tentative schedule is online at http://www.downtownwallawalla.com/promotions/fall_festival_foliage.htm or by calling the Foundation at (509) 529-8755.

Recently, visitors have found commonly used routes to Rooks Park inaccessible due to roadwork under way near the entrance. "The park is definitely open, but visitors will need to travel around the construction on Mill Creek Road," said Hays.

To avoid the road work, visitors should stay on U. S. Highway 12 heading east, continue past the Rooks Park sign and exit, past Harbert Road (also closed) to the Buroker Road/Spring Creek Road intersection, turn south onto Buroker Road and follow it to the portion of Mill Creek Road which is not under construction, turn west onto Mill Creek Road and follow it to the Rooks Park entrance on the left, instructed Hays.

Virgil B. Bennington Lake, also a Mill Creek Project recreation area, is accessible from Hwy. 12 by exiting south onto Tausick Way, continue past Walla Walla Community College, immediately on the south side of the Mill Creek crossing, turn left onto Reservoir Road and follow it to the lake. Bennington Lake recreation area remains open to vehicles throughout the winter months, except during particularly hazardous driving conditions, said Hays.

Visitors should remember that all regulations remain in place during the seasonal schedule change. This includes the requirement that pets be kept on a leash while using Rooks Park and the Mill Creek Recreation Trail.

